

Life and Ecological Ideas in Genesis Chapter 1:

A View from Taoism and Buddhism

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I. Introduction

In all ages and across all parts of the world, humankind has always followed the beauty and rules of the vast expanse of space and nature, dwelling upon their underlying foundation and truths. Despite disparities among different cultural environments in terms of language, conceptualization and expression, all people are heading towards a common direction. This study seeks to find the basis for the life and ecological ideas of nature in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. Instead of using traditional interpretation methodologies of the Bible, the argument proposed in this study is based on an understanding of the Taoism of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. Numerous studies in the field of the Old Testament have compared the creation theories found in Ancient Near East cultures including Mesopotamia and Egypt with the contents of Genesis chapter 1. However, this study takes a step back from the geographical and historical importance of the Ancient Near East region, examining the ancient China and Buddhist perceptions of the creation theory. While ancient China and Buddhism use different characters and concepts, this study refers to these cultures in an attempt to

examine the relation between space, nature and humans within the realms of life and natural ecology.

Inter-religious dialogue

In light of current trends showing that biblical theology is becoming the realm of western theologians¹⁾, I have given much thought to achieving an Asian interpretation, and to draw out dialogue between religions. Thus, while biblical hermeneutics methodologies based on traditional historical and literary criticism are used as a basis, this study attempts to go beyond these methodologies²⁾ and seeks to show that the 'truth' as perceived by the ancient Hebrews is not completely detached from the 'truth' as understood by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu as well as the Buddhists. In fact, 'truth' is an issue shared by all people, who share the universe and the nature it enfolds, in a common quest for the answers to their existence. This concept is valid only under the presumption that dialogue is possible between the Bible and other philosophical ideas, which come from completely different historical, cultural and religious backgrounds. Therefore, this study goes beyond the limits of existing hermeneutics methodologies to take an 'inter-religious dialogue' approach. In other words, the quest for divinity and truth, the perception of nature, and the deep understanding of humanity shown by different beliefs are considered within the same context. It is possible to achieve a deeper understanding of the scripture in biblical hermeneutics when we seek meaning within the ideas of various religions.

It is a well established theory that Genesis 1:1-2:4a was written by the Priestly author (P) during the exile to Babylon (583-538 B.C.). Seeing the fall of Judah, P looked back on the history of the Ancient Near East world and the ideologies of Israel, and gave birth to his theological masterpiece through the first chapter of Genesis. While the myths of creation passed down in the Ancient Near East told of cosmic confusion and struggles between gods³⁾, P's theory described creation not as a result of fighting gods but of space, nature and their perfect order and harmony with humankind. This is the fundamental difference between the Babylon myths and Genesis chapter 1. This is also the reason C. Westermann stated that while P associated with traditions older and wider in scope than those of Israel, he rejected the description of Enuma Elish and the creation theory of gods born in succession.⁴⁾

P is influenced by creation myths of Mesopotamia, but states his own concepts and perceptions more strongly, using his own methodologies to complete his theory. Therefore, while P merely gives a chronological literary description of the creation order according to an objective sequence, he binds together all matters of existence through complete harmony and dignity between the vast universe and life within nature, the nobility of humankind, and finally a connection between human and God. Thus, P explains that not only is each individual interconnected within the eternal activity of God and the universe, but each is also interdependent upon the others.

This study examines this theory in connection with the 연기사상 of Buddhism. In Buddhist philosophy, all things in the universe are interconnected, interdependent and interactive. This relationship between each element is the basis for the generation and change of all things, and each element is composed of a causality principle which

exists within itself.⁵⁾ 연기 means that 'all beings depend on one another' (相依性), and are related to one another.⁶⁾

It was not only the Ancient Near East world and the Old Testament that observed the creation of the world in relation to space and its vast movements. The 'Tao' concept which is introduced in the teachings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu also begins with the universe and goes on to provide directions for those who seek the truth. Buddhism also teaches of the life of nature, the universe, and humankind. None of these cultures are connected by any geographical or historical commonalities. However, based on the premise that all humans commonly ascribe religious meaning to the universe, divine power, and the origin of humans and nature, this study seeks to depart from a broad perception of the universe, and move towards a more narrow definition of life and ecological ideas as depicted in Genesis chapter 1 by examining the relationship between the two concepts. By attempting to define the concept from the Taoism of Lao-tzu/Chuang-tzu and a Buddhist standpoint, a common conceptual structure is examined. The purpose of this study lies not only in finding similarities among religious beliefs, but in sharing divine dimensions through inter-religious dialogue.

II. A 연기적 Outlook on Nature

1. In the beginning (太初): nothingness (無), origin (始原), wonder (妙)

1:1 In the beginning

'In the beginning' (בראשית) refers to the 'absolute start' of all things. The general interpretation is that this phrase marks the historic beginning of the creation of the earth and the heavens.⁷⁾ This is the first step into infinite time, a concept which is incomprehensible to the human mind.

A similar concept is introduced by Lao-tzu. The philosopher uses the words 'nothingness' (無) and 'wonder' (妙) to refer to the 'origin.' 'Nothingness' (無) is the origin of the heavens, while 'existence' (有) is the basis of all things.⁸⁾ A commentary by Wang-pi (王弼) tells us that the state in which 'Tao' has not yet been given a name, thus the state of 'nothingness' (無) or 'without name' (無名) means 'origin' (始原).⁹⁾ Noting that if 'origin' (始原) was considered the beginning of time, there would be infinite questions as to what was before 'origin' (始原), Kim Hang Bae interpreted the 'si-' (始) in origin (始原) to mean 'generation,' 'beginning' or 'creation.'¹⁰⁾ He believed that the 'nothingness' (無) or 'without name' (無名) asserted by Lao-tzu was not a strong denial of existence in itself, but rather a paradoxical expression of existence. Thus, Tao that is expressed through 'nothingness' (無) or 'without name' (無名) is in an absolute state of non-definition, but because generation and creation are included in the concept, 'nothingness' (無) and 'without name' (無名) also include the concept of 'origin' (始原).¹¹⁾

As another word for 'origin' (始原), Lao-tzu uses the word 'wonder' (妙) to describe the state before the heavens were separated from the earth. 'Wonder' (妙) refers to the pure state of existence before the heavens were divided from the earth and the objective was separated from the subjective. 'Wonder' (妙) cannot be perceived by the senses, nor can one understand the concept through a discretionary conscience.¹²⁾ Masao Abe explains the foundation of 'the beginning' by quoting Chuang-tzu, saying "If there was a beginning to the Beginning of time, there was time before the Beginning.

And the time before time existed before the time of the Beginning. If there is existence, there exists non-existence before existence. And if there is a time when 'nothingness' existed, there is time before 'nothingness,' thus a time when even 'nothingness' did not exist"¹³⁾ Thus, 'the beginning' is being expressed through 'nothingness' (無), 'origin' (始原), and 'wonder' (妙).

2. God: Tao (道)

1:1 God created the heavens and the earth.

According to the Old Testament, God created and continually supervises all beings of the universe, does not have shape, and watches over human souls and minds. A study of God is omitted in this study, as there have been numerous studies into the subject both domestically and internationally. Then, what is the concept of 'Tao' as put forth by Lao-tzu?

According to the first chapter of Tao-te Ching, "Tao cannot be explained or named."¹⁴⁾ Tao is not limited by anything, nor does it limit anything.¹⁵⁾

Lao-tzu says that Tao (道) is empty and shapeless, but its functions are limitless. It is so profound, that it is like the dominator of all things.¹⁶⁾ Thus, he believed that Tao was the substance and source of all creation, and all things of heaven and earth were generated through Tao.¹⁷⁾ Chuang-tzu gives a more advanced explanation of Tao. Chuang-tzu claimed that Tao created all things of the heavens and earth, and existed among its creations. It embodies all movement of its creations, becoming the principle behind changes in the movement of all things.¹⁸⁾ Chuang-tzu claimed through his words

"from which all things are generated" (萬物之所由)¹⁹⁾ that Tao gave birth to all things of the heavens and earth, controls the movement and change of its creations, and is a principle that must be adhered to in the growth and development process of all existence.²⁰⁾

Chuang-tzu thought: "as the substance of all things of the universe, Tao is that from which all things are generated."²¹⁾ This was interpreted by L.M. Jang to mean that "Tao is the foundation and the proof of existence of all things of the universe, from the past to eternity. Tao is endless, vast, formless and shapeless, and embraces all things of the world, as it will continue forever."²²⁾ Here, Tao is the substance of all things of the universe. Masao Abe says that "In an effort to reach ultimate existence, Chuang-tzu seeks to achieve complete negativity by seeking something that transcends ultimate existence including the beginning and end, existence and non-existence, what is there and isn't there. And this is Tao."²³⁾ Hans Küng and Julia Ching also explain that "Tao is universal; the beginning and the end. It cannot be defined, expressed or described. It exists between the heaven and earth. It existed before all things, and is the principle behind the origin of all things."²⁴⁾ Seong Cheol of the Korean Buddhist faith also expresses that "Tao is the foundation of the universe and the substance of all things; an absolute existence that transcends time and space"²⁵⁾; Tao is a formless, eternal existence that is the foundation of all things.

The God that P depicts in Genesis 1:1 is not in conflict with other gods, but establishes order within nature, and is the ultimate being that existed before the Beginning. He existed before the Beginning of time, and does not have an earthly form. Thus, he is described as a being that cannot be perceived by the human mind or sense. Meanwhile, the concept of 'Tao' as explained by Lao-tzu is also the origin of all things,

and is the basis of the earth, sky and human life. Tao cannot be grasped by the human senses, and cannot be comprehended.^{[26\)](#)}

3. Formless, Empty, Darkness: Absolute Nothingness(絕對無) and Void(空)

1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep

In the beginning, the earth and the skies were still covered in the 'deep'. The Hebrew words for 'formless' and 'void' are *tohu* (תהו) and *bohu* (בהו), respectively. *Tohu* (תהו)^{[27\)](#)} appears twenty times in the Old Testament, while *bohu* (בהו) can be found three times. W.F. Albright saw the combined use of the two words as a poetic expression, and focussed on the use of the two words together within the text.^{[28\)](#)} K. Galling also observed that “while a perfect explanation cannot be offered, P must have wanted to depict absolute nothingness [無] through the use of *tohuwabohu* (תהו ובהו)”^{[29\)](#)}, speculating that 'darkness' and 'deep' were used together to depict the absolute nothingness of the Beginning. Thus, the earth was in a state of non-existence, and 'nothingness' and 'non-existence' are semantically more relevant.^{[30\)](#)} Instead of interpreting darkness and creation as contrasting concepts where 'darkness' is the opposite of 'light' and 'sun' or going as far as interpreting 'darkness' to mean 'evil,' F. Delitsch said that “the focus is on the use of the terms 'formless,' 'emptiness' and 'darkness,' three similar words used in succession. These terms are related to the creation of the universe.” While the LXX translation understood that *tohuwabohu* (תהו ובהו) is unseen and still in disarray, the Vulgate translation uses words meaning 'none, nothingness and emptiness, void,' thus understanding the concepts of 'formless, empty

and darkness' not as individual meanings, but as a connected sequence, making up the state of absolute nothingness.^{[31\)](#)}

Thus, the two words are not interpreted as their literal meaning of confusion and disorder, nor is the negative interpretation which imposes a stark divide between good and bad applied. Rather, an interpretation that all elements were open at the Beginning is adopted. 'Formless' implies that the elements of the earth were not fixed but were flexible and open; 'empty' is seen as a positive expression referring to 'absolute nothingness.' The expression 'darkness was over the surface of the deep' also has a positive meaning, expressing the vast and endless nature of the Beginning.

In Tao-te Ching, the concept of 'one' (一) refers to the state before heaven and earth. Tao, which is empty and shapeless, is dependent on all things for the foundation of its existence. It is also the source from which all things of earth are generated, giving birth to one, which gives birth to two, which in turn gives birth to three and so on.^{[32\)](#)} This is the order in which the elements of the universe are created from Tao. Here, 'one' refers to the state before the generation of all things in the skies and the earth, where chaos has not yet given way to eruption. Creating two from one means generating the skies and the earth, or yin (negative) and yang (positive), which is the process of creation. Thus, Tao is the origin from which all forms generate, and under which all things unite.^{[33\)](#)}

Masao Abe states that in Buddhism, 'sunyata' is the state of emptiness and void, which also includes the concept of 'absolute nothingness' (絕對無)^{[34\)](#)} This is because 'sunyata' is an absolute concept, incomparable and inconceivable, unable to be acquired through reason or will. According to Abe, the positive meaning behind 'sunyata' is that it is an 'endless openness' which has no center and is not fixed on anything. In addition,

'sunyata' is unrestrained by self-centredness, human-centredness, universe-centredness, or even God-centredness. It cannot be defined by a single ideal. Therefore, in 'sunyata,' there is no fixed dominant-subordinate relationship between the universe and 'my things.'³⁵⁾ The formlessness, emptiness and darkness over the surface of the deep as expressed by P is synonymous with 'absolute nothingness,' and can also be seen in the same context as the concept of 'one' before the separation of the skies and the earth, as well as the 'sunyata.' Thus, the absolute negative of the formlessness, emptiness and darkness that was present in the Beginning is expressed as an absolute positive. This is a sign of absolute liberation and freedom, free from all limitations and restraints, which is possible in the freedom and endless openness found in a state of 'sunyata.'

4. The hovering Spirit of God: (常)

1:2 The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Here, P depicts the continuous and endless activity engaged in by the spirit of God in all of his creations. The term 'spirit' (רוח, *ruah*) appears in the Old Testament 389 times, of which 107 speak of God's activities within the world of nature and human lives.³⁶⁾ If the meaning of *ruah* is seen as the activities conducted within nature and human lives, then it depicts holy and universal power.³⁷⁾ Delitzsch points out that the combined term *tohuwabohu* depicts fear, showing that the Spirit of God is hovering over the origin of matter (物) in order to attain order.³⁸⁾

The 'Spirit of God' can be compared to the concept of '상' (常) as described by Lao-tzu, in that the Spirit intervenes in all divine providence regarding the universe and nature since the beginning of creation. The Lao-tzu concepts of '도' (道可道, 非常道, 名可名, 非常名) imply a state of constant Taoistic activity, while '상' (常) implies continued activity taking place into eternity.³⁹⁾ '상' is the life power of nature, and the self-rule or self-control principle of Taoistic activity. Thus, every phenomenon is a continuation of a rotating Taoistic life cycle, and not a temporary activity. According to Hang Bae Kim, Tao cannot be conceptualized by words, nor can it be understood through the senses. It exists by itself without depending on anything else, and its activities are vast enough to include the realms of all entities. Tao has the power to produce anything, but does not act on itself. Rather, it acts within a vast rotation.⁴⁰⁾ Thus, the eternal activity of the Spirit of God is used synonymously with '상' in that Tao is an eternal existence which has its own principle of activity.

If the Spirit of God maintains the order of the universe and nature into eternity and continues to intervene in human lives, then the 상 concept of Lao-tzu is also an eternal existence which has its own principle of activity.

III. A 연기적 Outlook on Nature: Life and Ecology

1. Sky, land and sea: Nature of Sky and Land (天地自然)

1:8 God called the expanse "sky"

1:10 God called the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters he called "seas" .

1:16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.

As mentioned in the introduction, the 'sky' and 'seas' in the Ancient Near East myths are home to the gods, and the place of confrontations.^{[41\)](#)} In Genesis, however, the division of nature takes place naturally, without any conflicts. Of the elements introduced in Genesis chapter 1, the sun and moon are very important divinities of Israel's neighbouring world, but P treats them as mere created things, which function as only a division between day and night.^{[42\)](#)} While meaning is endowed on the creation of each of the elements of sky, land, seas, plants, stars, sun and moon, a more fundamental observation shows that each of these elements is seen as being interdependent. The plants are able to exist because the skies and the land exist; the seas and plants are able to exist because the sun and moon exist. All things exist because of the relationship that they forge with the other elements. This explains the causal relationship between the universe and the connected elements. Invertedly, plants and animals would not exist without the existence of the skies, land, sun and moon.

Thus, according to the principle of causality, the existence and actions of an element rely on the existence and actions of another, and all things of the universe including the plants are interdependent upon each other.^{[43\)](#)} The sun and moon are not separate from each other but are connected, and 'day' and 'night' are not two separate entities but are of a single existence.

2. Plants and animals: variety and life

1:12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

1:20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."

1:21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

1:22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

The universe, skies, land, water and seas became a habitat for the plants and animals, and living nature is explained in its beauty. Plants sprout from the ground, seeds produce fruit, and trees are produced in great variety. This shows the continuation of nature. Thus, God does not let go for one minute, but continues to create anew.

God's creation process is a continuation of separation.^{[44\)](#)} The earth is produced, the skies are separated from the earth, plants are separated into various species which cover the earth. Therefore, of the countless plants that exist on the earth, each single plant is a part of a whole, and belongs to a species. Thus no organisms including plants and animals are subordinate to humans, but are an independent creation of God and have equal status under the Creator.

Different species of birds and fish were created, and birds flew "above the earth across the expanse of the sky," differentiating them from other creatures and displaying their uniqueness. By stating that "God saw that it was good," the dignity of each plant and animal is expressed. Thus, they are not passive objects in relation to humans but

are independent entities worthy of respect and living in harmony with all things of nature.

The expression of 진여 (眞如) shown through the phrase "God saw that it was good" continues on when talking of the creation of plants and animals. It can be seen through the expression "according to their kinds" (1:21) that the 'good' implies 'differences.' When considering the differences between plants and animals, the tens of thousands of types of plants, animals and insects, as well as micro-organisms and plankton which are invisible to the naked eye, the earth is covered with an enormous number of 'different' organisms that live in harmony. As these organisms live and survive, they benefit each other within the vast scope of nature, living as independent beings, even though they become predator and prey in the cycle of nature. Therefore, the expression "according to their kind" should be understood not only as a quantitative difference, but as a qualitative concept expressing the value of each different element.

In verse 22, God orders all living things to "be fruitful and increase in number." Thus, the creation of living things is differentiated from the creation of other things. The structure of the expression is also changed, from the term 'made' used when referring to non-living creatures, to the term 'blessed' when speaking of living animals.^{[45\)](#)} While the change was most likely an intentional one made by P, it shows the dignity of living things, calling them blessed creations.^{[46\)](#)}

Westermann, as many other interpreters of the Bible, thought that the immense variety of plants was not created for humankind, and that P believed that plants were not created for the purpose of feeding humankind.^{[47\)](#)} Plants were created in their variety for their own existence, and some happen to produce fruit and grains which provide

nutrition for humans. Birds, fish and all organisms are created for their existence, and are not subordinate to humankind.

3. Vegetarianism: life and ecology

1:29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

1:30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

Verses 29 and 30 provide instructions to people and animals regarding food. The literary expression "Then God said" emphasizes the fact that God speaks directly to his creations. In verse 11, the mention of different species of seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees reflects their function of providing grains and fruit to people and grass and vegetation to animals. God officially states of the various types of plants "I give [you] every green plant for food." The creation myths of Babylon also speak of the creation of food for humans.

After 아누, 엔릴, 엔키, 닌후삭

made black-haired Man,

Vegetation began to spring from the earth,

and animals and four-legged creations

artificially brought existence.

(*ANET*, 43)

After his creation, humans are seen eating vegetables. According to Mesopotamian tradition, they are forbidden from killing animals,^{[48\)](#)} and according to Ancient Near Eastern myths, are allowed only to eat fruit and vegetables and no meat.^{[49\)](#)}

Humans are created before Genesis 1:29–30, after which the direction in which they should carry out their life is described. God says "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (v.29). He adds that "to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food." He does not give the beasts of the earth and birds of the sky to humans as food.

At the time of the Babylon exile, P inevitably was aware of the provisions of Leviticus chapter 11 regarding clean and unclean animals traditionally passed down through the Israel society. However, there is no mention of people catching animals for food with regard to creation. Rather, through the story of creation, the focus seems to be on the provision of plants as food for animals and people. If the story of creation according to P touches upon all creation from the foundations of the universe to the foundations of humankind, the passage seems to imply that people are not to eat animals, but vegetation.

Such suggestions continue into Genesis chapter 2, on the topic of paradise. It is not right for a person to kill another living organism. Even if it is to fulfill a need in the present life, the killing of a living organism does not correspond with the will of the Creator in the beginning. P speaks in terms of the era of the beginning, when there

were no restraints from historic, social, cultural and religious conditions.⁵⁰⁾ Such a motif can be seen in later passages mentioning peace between animals.⁵¹⁾

Genesis chapter 1 is the foundation of everything, and the original form of God's will. In this sense, P fundamentally believes in vegetarianism. This gives an accurate look at P's ideas regarding life and ecology. P does not adopt the confrontation schema of the Near East myths of creation, nor do his ideals regarding nature include the conquest of nature through the killing of living organisms. Rather, he seeks harmony between life forms and an ecological outlook on nature. According to P's understanding of nature in Genesis chapter 1, all living and non-living organisms are fundamentally linked to the universe, and the right to life is respected, bringing about harmony instead of conquest within nature.

The respect for life that Buddhists have can be seen in [사분율] (四分律); a total of sixty volumes which include 348 articles (or 500 rules) that Buddhist priests must follow, including rules against murder, theft, lust, and dishonesty. Failure to comply by the rules can lead to divestiture of priesthood.

Pouring water where living organisms live into mud, grass or at someone else is considered a violation of the rules.⁵²⁾ A Buddhist follower who pours water with any living organisms in it into an area without water is committing murder. Causing another to carry out such actions is also considered a sin, as it is 'intentional killing of an insect.' 'Drinking water with insects in it,'⁵³⁾ 'intentionally disposing of an organism's life,'⁵⁴⁾ and 'throwing away water used to wash dishes in the house'⁵⁵⁾ are also prohibited. Spitting, defecating or urinating on grass or vegetables is prohibited,⁵⁶⁾ as is

spitting, defecating or urinating in the water.^{[57\)](#)} Making needle baskets out of bone, ivory and cow horns is prohibited.^{[58\)](#)}

Such prohibitions are evidence of the high value placed on life and nature in the Buddhist faith.

One can catch a glimpse of the Buddhist outlook on the through the set of rules which extend from 'do not throw away water used to wash a bowl with rice left on it in the house' to 'do not spit, defecate or urinate on grass or wild vegetation.' Buddhist priest Seong-cheol described the respect shown towards nature in the Buddhist faith by saying "In Buddhism, all life forms are revered as Buddha. Ugliness and humbleness are only of the surface; the true form of all living things are no different than that of Buddha himself. All are magnificent and all are noble. Therefore, flies, ants, sly looking wolves and tigers must be respected just as Buddha, not to mention people with whom one associates. Then all misery gives way to eternal happiness."^{[59\)](#)}

The message conveyed by the Avatamska Sutra of Buddhism shows deep insight. Respect for each individual thing existing within the net of 연기 (緣起) stems from the belief that all living things have an innate potential of becoming a Buddha (佛性). The [자비경] speaks of the fundamentals of life and nature in the Buddhist faith:

All living things, whether they are scarred, healthy or in any other state, whether they are long, short, small, visible or invisible, just born or yet unborn, should be comfortable. As a mother devotes her life to protecting an only son, we must show unlimited mercy to all living creatures.^{[60\)](#)}

The Buddhist outlook on life and nature defines the existence of an individual organically within the existence of the entire universe. If the life of nature is not recognized or is made a subject of domination, or if the unique nature of the natural world is not respected, human selfishness and greed continues to grow, causing damage to nature and to others. Therefore, 연기론 would then pose a negative influence on life and the natural environment.

By inserting the expression "and God saw that it was good" after the creation of the universe, earth, and all types of animals and plants, the dignity of each individual creation is shown. Thus, all things are magnificent and noble. This is where the common belief regarding nature and life can be found between Genesis chapter 1 and Buddhist belief.

IV. A 연기적 Outlook on Humankind

1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

2:7 The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Humankind in the image of God: living things (衆生), Bodhisattva (菩薩), 여성품 (如來性品), (法性)

The Ancient Near East world was a slave society in which the king had absolute deitcal power. P overturns this society, stating that the king is not a divinity, but that all people are created in the image of God. This is a product of utmost creativity, expressing human rights and dignity in their highest. At the same time, the expression implies that the characteristics of God are innately within human nature, implying a characteristic link between God and people. P depicts a series of creations from the universe to nature to humankind, in the process of which people are an element of the universe, which lives within the life structure of nature and the environmental ecosystem. This is emphasized through the literary expressions of 'the first day,' 'the sixth day,' and so forth. Here, moving and breathing beings, thus human and animal, are blessed and given the ability to breed, and the right to spread each of their species.

Then how should we interpret what God meant in 'ruling over' (רדה) all creatures of the earth? The verb for 'ruling over' (רדה) means 'to step on grapes for wine,'^{[61](#)}, 'conquer, dominate,'^{[62](#)}, and 'the rule of the king.'^{[63](#)} Thus, as the literal meaning of the word is to rule, step on and conquer, human rule over the animal is also assumed to be of similar meaning.

While the law of the Egyptian Empire uses this dominant term, the creation myths of Sumer and Babylon tell us that people were created in order to serve the gods and work for the many deeds of the gods. In this context, they must continue to work together and serve the gods.^{[64](#)} If so, the intention in verse 26 may be for people to live in harmony with the animal world. Westermann called this a true hierarchy of order.^{[65](#)} Thus, order is obtained not through domination, but through cooperation and companionship.

P's intention can be clearly read by connecting verses 16 and 29. To rule over the animals cannot mean to kill them for food. In verse 16, the sun 'governing' over the day and the moon 'governing' over the night does not mean restraint and pressure. In the same way, verse 26b means that people are to 'rule over' the animal world without any conditions. Their rule over animals does not mean a relationship of exploitation.^{[66\)](#)} Establishing a vertical order between human and animal in a positive sense means to establish a partnership relationship between the two.

Thus, verse 26 is speaking of P's understanding of the human positive attitude towards all living things. This in turn means a relationship with all living things.^{[67\)](#)} Thus, we must look over the literal meaning of the expression 'rule over' as a term referring to the dominate-submit concept, (in this case, whether it is acceptable to kill animals) and understand the expression to mean the harmonious relationship between people and animals, which is possible within the natural order, when the animal's right to life is acknowledged.

By creating humanity in God's image and breathing God's own life into human nostrils, a connection between God, the universe, nature, and humankind is formed. Thus, people do not only live within the confines of nature where their body and spirit are physically restrained. The spirit exists in connection with God. Therefore, they can live only within the existence of others, such as God, the universe and nature. Because each person has a spirit, the person formed 'in the image of God' can meet the eternal and omnipotent God by their own efforts (自省).

God is also manifest through people. The expression 'and God saw that it was good' shows the dignity of each of God's creations, and God 'breathed life' into human beings, establishing a relationship with them (Genesis 2:7). At the same time, because the

nature of God is innately in people, they can devote themselves to the pursuit of truth and a 'Tao-like' heart like God.

In Buddhism, the term for 'living things' (衆生) means 'everything that has life,' and 'an innate potential to become a Buddha.' Here, an innate potential to become a Buddha refers to a 'Buddha-like character.' The 여래성품(如來性品) of [대반열반경] means that 'all living things have the potential to become a Buddha.'⁶⁸⁾ It also states that 'the potential to become a Buddha is the same in all living things' (一切衆生 皆有本性). In other words, whether it be Buddha himself or a life condemned to hell because of many sins, the true nature of both are identical. Therefore, no matter how many sins are committed and no matter how evil a person, one is not to hate or condemn anyone; instead all must be forgiven. Thus, the 'Buddha-like character' present in all living things is synonymous to the 'image of God' as depicted in Genesis chapter 1.

Another similar concept found in Buddhism is 'the realm of Buddhists' (法界), or 'dharma' (法性). The 'realm of Buddhism' refers to the true form of every living thing's body and spirit. It means that the only true limit is a natural holiness that is bright, uninterrupted, vast, empty and calm. It is the spiritual world found in the depth of the heart, the holiness which can only be seen through eyes that see through truth and wisdom that has transcended all futile thoughts.⁶⁹⁾ Thus, dharma is the principle or the characteristic that enables the existence of 'the unique character of Buddhism,' or 'all things of 연기' (諸法).⁷⁰⁾ Thus, dharma is an objective entity that is independent from the conscience. It is not a 'thing,' but the true nature of our body and minds.⁷¹⁾

In Buddhism, all living things are called 'Bodhisattva' and H.S. Gil refers to the state of high understanding reached by a Bodhisattva. Through a strong yearning for understanding and wisdom, one can move freely between the two worlds of truth and

worldliness, life/death and Nirvana, transcendency and history, freedom and devotion, detachment and participation.⁷²⁾ Also, vast is the human spirit which has not yet transcended worldly desires but has the earnest wish to escape from the anguish of life and death. Thus, while all humans are 'living things' and 'Bodhisattva' is Buddhism, one must reach a stage of awakening in order to attain that status. Therefore, it is said that 'all things are of the heart' (一切有心) putting the human mind or spirit at the center of all things. Religion is at the center of a person's heart, and the 'image of God' and 'dharma' towards truth and 'Bodhisattva' are all things we must seek in order to return to the true human nature.

V. A 연기적 Outlook on Time and Space

1:5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

The first book of Genesis is particularly focused on time. This is because of an interest on the length of the creation process. The expression "there was evening and there was morning" is enough to rouse curiosity about whether the concept of 'day' in this context refers to a day in its literal sense, or to hundreds of thousands or even billions of years.

However, there is no need to provide a scientific explanation to the meaning of the one, two or three days. The six days of creation can be understood to be a literary expression used by P to emphasize the importance of the Sabbath during the Babylon exile. The repeated use of the expression "and there was evening and there was

morning" by P was understood by Westermann to be of similar context with the family tree depicted on Genesis ch. 5, which records how many years each member lived. Thus, this is merely a chronological account of the creation process.

While P uses the repeated literary expression of a 'day' to depict the passing of time during the creation process, this shows that 'time' has a binding function between the earth, sky and nature in the process of carrying out the act of creating the special concept of the universe as well as the space and individual elements of nature. Thus, each individual product of creation does not live in its own scattered area, but is bound together by time in a common place defined by the skies, earth and the sea. Each blade of grass and each tiny plankton is connected within the space of nature, and exist in interdependence to the same time frame. The reason that 'light' and 'darkness,' as well as 'sky' and 'earth' are named is to show that just as the skies and the earth are interdependent, so the light is dependent on darkness for its existence, and vice versa. The idea that darkness exists because light exists, and light exists because darkness exists is an eastern concept which is exemplified in the 연기적 beliefs of Buddhism.

When the land was formless and in a state of void and darkness, the discontinuous elements of the earth began to connect with the creation of light. The 'formlessness' and 'void' of the land which were not interdependent began to form a spacial relationship through the light, and the day and night formed a temporal relationship.

Despite the creative literary expressions by P and the influence of Egypt and Mesopotamia in the Ancient Near East in the creation process of Genesis chapter 1, we can see that there is no fundamental difference between the east and west or Buddhism and the Old Testament regarding their perceptions of the universe and all of its

elements. Thus, a connection between the existences can be seen, and everything is interdependent with another, unable to exist independently or self-sufficiently.^{[73\)](#)}

Kim Hang Bae saw the turning of night to day as a simple phenomenon, and did not acknowledge the absolute difference between the two. Thus, day is comprised of continuous activity towards night, and identically, night is comprised of continuous activity towards day. Therefore, day and night are merely a difference in wording, there is no absolute difference between the two states.^{[74\)](#)} In other words, day is night, and night is day,^{[75\)](#)} an expression which may sound paradoxical, but well defines the truth nevertheless.

This concept of time, which can be summarized through the proposition that 'everything changes' (諸行無常), is the basis of the Buddhist's view of the world. Because nothing is permanent, every phenomena or thing can exist only within change. Existence within the process of change means existence within the boundaries of time; thus, nothing is fixed, and everything is subject to time.^{[76\)](#)}

The expressions 'day and night' and 'there was evening and there was morning' which can be found in Genesis chapter 1 bind together the spacial elements produced through the creation process through the concept of time. No individual thing under the universe can exist without being dependent on another, within the boundaries of time and space. Ultimately, all of God's creations exist within an 연기적인 relationship.

VI. Pure Nature (無爲自然) and Great Tao (大道)

1. "God saw that it was good": 無爲自然

1:4,10,25 God saw that it was good.

Everyone wants to be recognized for their work; in these verses, God evaluates his own work, saying "God saw that it was good,"^{[77](#)} and in Enuma Elish, the creation of the world is carried out in praise of Marduk.

The Hebrew word for 'good,' *tov* (טוב), is used as an adverb, and has a wider meaning than its English counterpart; joy, reality, suitability, goodness, vicinity, correctness, and general goodness.^{[78](#)} In any sense, 'good' should not be understood as a fixed unchanging quality. The world that God created and called 'good' fulfills the objective of God's creation to the full. The description of God's creations in Genesis 1:31 is not artificial, and *tov* (טוב, being good for) is a state of creation, which reaches its peak through the creation of humankind.^{[79](#)} This expression by God is one describing the absolute beauty of nature, referring to the harmony created between living and non-living things in a world that has never been experienced before.

Thus, God's approval of his creation means that the world was created in order, each was given a name, and God evaluated his creations. In regards to this evaluation, Westermann states that this was not an earthly evaluation,^{[80](#)} but an expression used by God to depict the beauty and harmony of the perfect creation through God's eyes. This not only includes emotional meaning regarding the creation, but also the dignity of all elements including the universe, sun, moon, stars, earth and plants, which are organically connected to each other. Therefore, the term 'good' as God used it is an absolute concept that can only be expressed by God, and not a relative concept capable of earthly comparison. This is why we must respect all things, including every blade of grass. While only humankind was created 'in the image of God,' (1:26–27) God

expresses absolute respect for all plants and animals as well as nature and the universe by saying that he saw that it was good. Therefore, although creating people in his image and showing approval of the created things of nature are two different expressions, the author believes that they carry synonymous meanings.

Such expression by God can also be found in the Tae Te Ching. Lao-tzu calls the true state of nature which has not been manipulated or altered 'Pure Nature' (無爲自然).^{[81\)](#)} The term for 'pure' is not simply an opposite concept of 'artificial,' but is an inclusive concept of all things while at the same time transcending all things.^{[82\)](#)} 'Pure Nature' is expressed through the 청정한 점 (心淸淨), 진공 (眞空), 심광명 (心光明), 묘유 (妙有) of the heart, and is a paradoxical expression of the unlimited activities of pure existence which transcends all limitations, restrictions and relativism of the 'artificial' (人爲). Nothing else is needed; all activity is based on a principle of inevitability of the self.^{[83\)](#)} This is 'Pure Nature,' which is also called 'Tao' (道).

Then, how does Lao-tzu view this 'Nature'? According to Kim Hang Bae, "Nature is not artificially manipulated but exists in its own element. It does not rest, but is always engaged in pure activity. It has its own principle of activity. It transcends all conflicts and all things, but at the same time can be found in all things, enabling them to exist and act in each of their specialities. All things come of Nature and return to Nature, and the foundation of all things can be found in the principle that 'Tao is Nature' (道卽自然),^{[84\)](#)} which implies that Tao and Nature are of equal status. Chuang-tzu also said that 'the skies and land are the largest of all forms'^{[85\)](#)} and that 'the skies and land are the mother of all things.'^{[86\)](#)} meaning that the skies along with the land are the largest forms of the earth, and that the sky is generated from Tao, and is composed of 'chi.' As Tao is combined and realized in the heavens there is nothing artificial about its nature, and the

skies are also natural and without manipulation, thus Pure Nature.^{[87\)](#)} The expression 'God saw that it was good' can be seen as an explanation which combines (圓融) Tao and creations in a relationship. Thus, the self and others, humankind and nature, humankind and god are equal without exception in 진여 (眞如).^{[88\)](#)} From the perspective of 진여, the discrimination and equality, differences and sameness are all achieved with the achievement of emptiness (공). This applies not only to you and me, but to the self and others, and the self and nature. The self is the self, and nature is nature, each having their own differences. However, when 진여 is achieved, there is no difference between humans and non-humans (nature and supernatural beings) which remain as they are in individuality.^{[89\)](#)}

Through the expression 'and God saw that it was good,' the individuality of each living thing in all of its kinds is acknowledged in its pure state, and all are completely equal regardless of size or length. This state is called 'Pure Nature.'

2. “he rested...from all his work which he had done”: Great Tao (大道)

2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because in it he rested from all his work which God created and made.

According to P, God created for six days, after which he rested on the seventh. The final scene of this process is magnificent. God finished the heavens and the earth and all

the host of them (2:1), and rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done (2:2). And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (2:3). These final scenes can be interpreted as simple literary patterns adopted by P in order to emphasize the importance of the Sabbath during the exile. However, meaning can be found in that God finished his creation, blessed and sanctified the day after completion, creating the whole universe out of the oblivion of the 'Beginning.' Furthermore, God completed perfection, creating the plants, animals and people to live in that universe, and connecting all elements in an organic relationship with one other. The finest display of God's creation is in the life that he breathed into the human nostrils (2:7), enabling people to associate with God and instilling in the human heart a yearning for truth.

If this verse was not included in the description of the creation process, people would also be no more than a simple element of the world of nature. Through this verse, people are sublimated into a higher existence which shares a spiritual relationship with God, acquire truth (Tao), govern over their own hearts to pursue the highest virtues, unite under spiritualism in its deepest state, and obtain absolute freedom of the mind.

Resting on the seventh day after completing the act of creation and blessing the Sabbath is a higher achievement than the six days of creation itself, and can be expressed as the 'Great Tao.' All things of heaven and earth exist in their own space and time, and life forms survive by adapting to their own organic changes. People are also intertwined in this 연기적 net structure, conforming to the order of life and the ecosystem, and becoming holy through the pursuit of truth.

VII. Conclusion

The first book of Genesis was written during the Babylon exile by P. P was influenced by the Ancient Near East creation myths, but created his own literary framework to depict his own vast understanding of nature, the natural order and peacefulness of life and the ecosystem, as well as his respect for human rights. Taking a step away from traditional western hermeneutics, the concept of creation is also found in the teachings of ancient China. While the history, geography, ideals and religions of the two hemispheres do not overlap, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu had already introduced the idea of a Divinity through the concept of Tao, which governs over the creation of the universe and nature, and carries a humanistic meaning. In the Buddhist faith, the relationships between the concepts of 無, 無爲自然, 始原, 妙, 空, 眞如 are used to describe the origin of space and its initial form. In this study, common themes and ideals between the two different cultures were examined.

When examining the issue of 'life and ecology' out of the simple context of nature and the environment and instead observing each blade of grass and each micro-organism invisible to the naked eye as a work of God in connection and in harmony with the universe, nature, and people, the vast meaning of creation becomes understandable to the human mind, at least to a rational degree. As the part cannot be separated from the whole, my existence is interdependent (相依性) on and with the existence of others.

P's understanding of the relationships between God, the immeasurable universe, the life and ecology of nature and ideas of human respect, are connoted in his creative literary form depicted through the idea that "God created the world." This is also a common ideal shared by ancient China and Buddhism.

The relationships between the universe, nature and humans are at the same time absolutely negative and absolutely positive. Nature is not at the disposal of humans to

rule, subordinate, exploit and kill. A peaceful life and ecology within the bounds of nature and the right to life of all plants and animals are expressed through the ideals of absolute liberation, freedom and equality. This is the basis of 'the right of plants and animals to life.'

The spread of capitalism has escalated human selfish desires to no end, and has in the process destroyed the value of all life forms within the ecosystem. Christianity must also break free from the logic of capitalism which has made belief desensitized to globalization. We must overcome the prejudices and high-handed attitudes towards other religions, and realize that the goal of creation was to accept the 'differences' between each kind in order to seek truth in harmony.